

Work without Hope

by: Samuel Taylor Coleridge

All Nature seems at work. Slugs¹ leave their lair²--
The bees are stirring--birds are on the wing--
And Winter slumbering³ in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair⁴, nor build, nor sing.
Yet, well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the fount⁵ whence streams of nectar⁶ flow.
Bloom⁷, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow⁸, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells⁹ that drowse¹⁰ my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve¹¹,
And hope without an object cannot live.

¹ a small creature with a soft body

² a place where an animal hides or sleep.

³ sleeping

⁴ working together or having relationship with others

⁵ source

⁶ the sweet liquid that Bees collect from flowers

⁷ flower

⁸ forehead

⁹ a piece of magic

¹⁰ to be in a light sleep

¹¹ a round wire kitchen tool with a lot of small holes

Summary:

With the start of each new day, each and every human, animal, bird and insect, begin their work without stopping. Bees are moving from flower to flower in search of nectar. The birds are flying with wings to catch the early worm. Each one can feel the cold of winter and sleep in the open air. Though the cold of winter seems endless, yet it seems to wear a smiling face for a dream of spring. The narrator finds himself the only idle creature that does not do any of the work of making honey, pairing up with similar creatures like him for work, building up nest or homes nor sing like birds. Yet he knows well on the banks of the river where the amaranths grow; the amaranths in classical myth and legend are the flowers that blossom eternally and their nectar is the drink of the gods. The clear waters glide at high speed over the rich streams. Yet he walks and moves from place to place hopelessly. So he wonders to himself as to why he is so listless and lazy. Then he realizes that to work without hope is useless and frustrating. He has nothing to hope for.

Difficult words:

lair (animal's dwelling)

pair (verb: to mate)

ken (know)

amaranth (flower of immortality)

nectar (drink of the gods)

blow (verb: to blossom)

sieve (a strainer)

Figures of Speech

Personification: (Nature working, Winter smiling, Hope living/dying, etc.) The nature, winter and hope receive the human traits of working, smiling, living and dying.

Sound techniques

Alliteration: (leave/lair, bees/birds, smiling/spring, banks/blow, fountains/flow, spells/soul)

Theme: Lack of hope changes possible action to impossible. For without hope, there can never be success.

Rhyme Scheme: abab bbcc ddee ff (very unusual)

Tone : The poet is speaking in a desperate sad tone and serious one. He has no hope in the future.

Notes

Line 1: Thesis (all living things are busy)

Lines 1-4: Support for thesis (birds, bees, winter)

Lines 5-6: Contrast (Only the speaker isn't busy)

Lines 7-10: Transition (The speaker knows the secret of immortality¹, but he cannot achieve it)

Lines 11-12: Restatement of problem.

Lines 13-14: In the couplet, the speaker reveals the ultimate reason for his failure: despair.

Structure: somewhat unclear, but first twelve lines describe a problem and the last two lines explain its cause.

"Work Without Hope" is a poem consists of three stanzas (4 lines each) with a couplet (2 lines). The rhyme scheme is ABAB BBCC DDEE FF, it is written in iambic pentameter. Some people say it could be regarded as a sonnet, it consists of 14 lines, although it is not written in traditional sonnet form. But the development of the poem is presented the same way as in a sonnet; the poem develops in the first 12 lines. The last two lines then present the overall theme of the poem to the reader. The poem was written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge; an English poet, literary critic and philosopher who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England. One of his famous poems is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

The first stanza focuses on nature and how all of nature has work to do, with the start of each new day, each and every human, animal, bird and insect, begin their work without stopping. Slugs leave their lair; Bees are moving from flower to flower in search of nectar; The birds are flying. They are awakening after Winter and preparing for the work of Spring. Though the cold of winter seems endless, yet it seems to wear a smiling face for a dream of spring.

In the second stanza, the speaker contrasting himself with the animals, he has nothing to do, he is the "sole unbusy thing". He sees nature and begins to realize that while it is beautiful, he has trouble seeing the beautiful. Winter is often considered a desolate season, but yet all the creatures work except him, he lacks purpose. He finds himself the only idle creature that does not do any of the work of making honey, pairing up with similar creatures like him for work, building up nest or homes nor sing like birds. Yet he knows well on the banks of the river where the amaranths grow; the amaranths in classical myth and legend are the flowers that blossom eternally and their nectar is the drink of the gods.

In the third stanza, he knows of the beauty surrounding him. Yet he walks and moves from place to place hopelessly, not able to see the beauty and appreciate it. This represents his lack of success. He is despairing, and sees no hope for his future. So he wonders to himself as to why he is so listless and lazy.

The last two lines of this poem are the turning point, and make it all come together. The speaker is saying that drawing nectar in a sieve is impossible because it just drains through, as will any work without hope. Hope cannot live without an object, because if there is no hope and no point, then there is no reason to continue. These lines show how hopeless the man is. He has nothing to hope for.

To sum up, the poem is relating nature to the emotions of the speaker. The images and word choice Coleridge uses in this poem help us to see the true despair in the man's life. Each line helps us read into the man's emotions and gives us a clearer picture of what Coleridge is trying to portray. The theme of this poem is that lack of hope changes possible action to impossible. For without hope, there can never be success. The poet is speaking in a desperate sad tone and serious one. He has no hope in the future. The structure is somewhat unclear, but first twelve lines describe a problem and the last two lines explain its cause. This poem is excellent and provides a clear picture to the reader.